

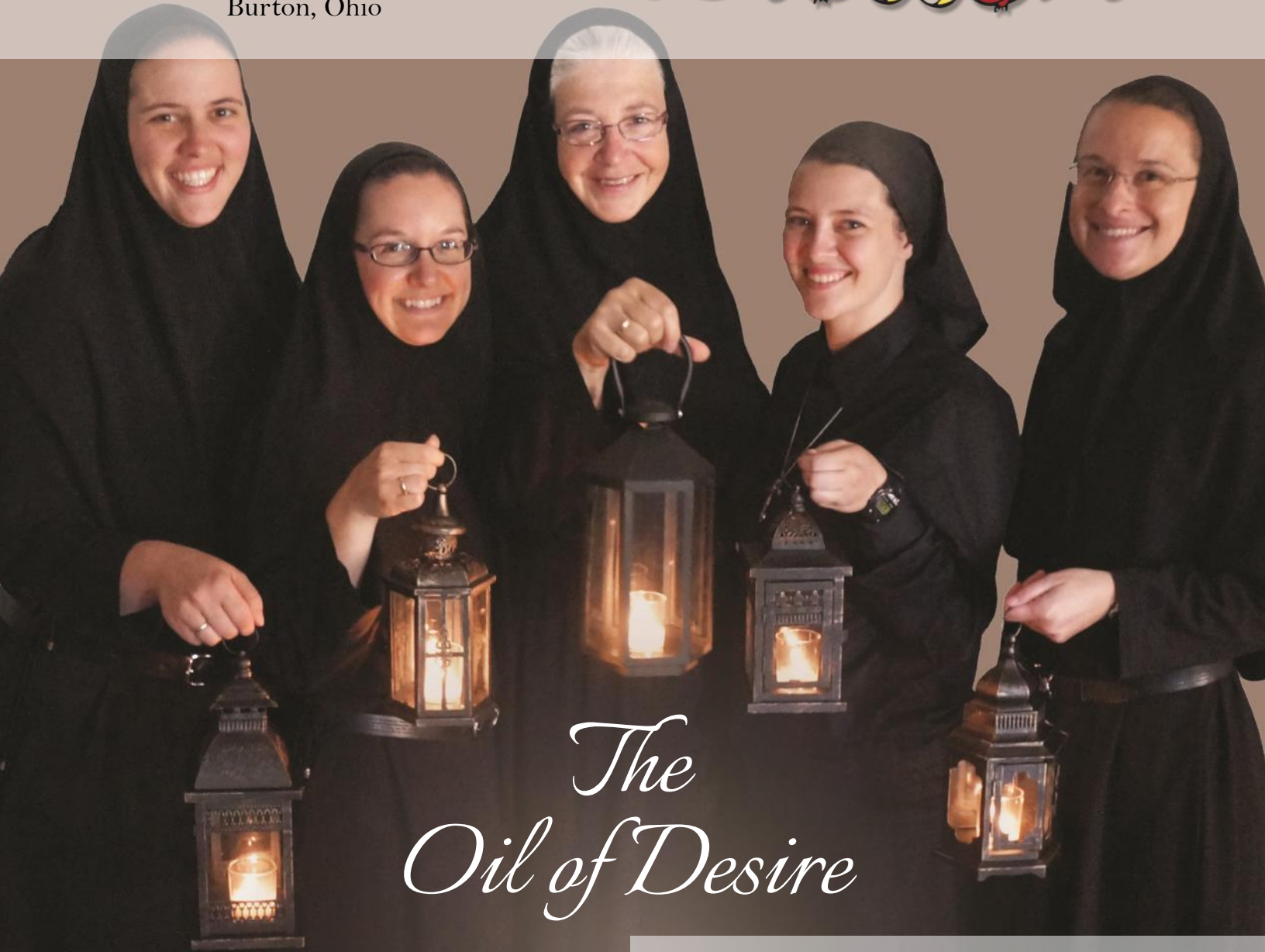
Pomegranate Blossoms

Let us go early to the vineyards,
and see if the vines are in bloom,
If the buds have opened,
if the pomegranates have blossomed;
There will I give you my love.

Song of Songs 7:13

Fruits of Our Monastic Garden

Christ the Bridegroom Monastery
Burton, Ohio



The Oil of Desire

A reflection by Mother Theodora on the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Mt 25:1-13).

“Behold, the Bridegroom is here! Go and welcome Him!” What stirs in your heart? “The Bridegroom is here!” Does your heart leap, does it wince or is it indifferent? We, like the ten virgins, all hear the same message and are called to be prepared, to keep vigilance and to respond at the arrival of the Bridegroom with blazing lamps filled with oil.

Summer/Fall 2016

Volume 6 Issue 2

What is this oil? St. Seraphim of Sarov teaches us that the oil is “the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God.” He says, “The true goal of our Christian life consists in the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. What God requires is a true faith in Himself and His Only begotten Son. In return He generously bestows the grace of the Holy Spirit. The Lord seeks hearts filled with love for God and for one’s neighbor.” This oil is the oil of desire—

Continued from previous page

the oil of love. Jesus promises us, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, because He abides with you, and He will be in you” (Jn 14:15-17).

We should learn from the foolish virgins who were indifferent and sought oil at the “market place” (the world that cannot receive, see or know the Spirit of Truth). How often do we seek to purchase the oil of our desires in the “market place” and become distracted and lost in its distorted view of reality and its temporal gratification and artificial fulfillment? The Bridegroom is the ultimate fulfillment of our desires.

becoming a longing for God” (Mary: The Church and the Source, Ratzinger and Hans Urs Von Balthasar, 2005). Our “oil of desire” that keeps our lamps burning is continuously replenished and purified with each encounter with Christ. St. Augustine, in his reflection on Psalm 37, says, “Desire is your prayer; and if your desire is without ceasing, your prayer will also be without ceasing. The continuance of your longing is the continuance of your prayer.”

*Our “oil of desire” that
keeps our lamps
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with Christ.*



Icon mural of the Parable of the Foolish and Wise Virgins;
Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, Parma, Ohio

All ten virgins were virtuous and did good works. However, the oil of the Holy Spirit filled the wise virgins’ hearts with desire and love for God and neighbor, while in contrast, the foolish virgins, who were lacking this oil, were indifferent and acted more out of obligation than love.

The five wise virgins were prepared because they knew and loved the Bridegroom and possessed the oil of desire. Prayer, which is ultimately union with God, is essential to know and desire Christ. Prayer is a dialogue or a knowing silence of oneness of being with the Other. “The Fathers of the Church say that prayer, properly understood, is nothing other than

This longing is echoed in the troparian (hymn) for a woman martyr, “I love you my Bridegroom. I seek You with *painful longing*,” and expressed in Psalm 63:1,3, “O God, You are my God. For You I *long*, for You my soul is *thirsting*. My body *pires* for You like a dry, weary land without water.” May our hearts be lamps burning with desire for union with the Bridegroom as His heart mutually yearns for us (Sg 7:11). His love for us is an eternal, inexhaustible flame that nothing can quench (Sg 8:7).

The sessional hymn for Matins of Great and Holy Tuesday incites us to be enflamed with divine desire for Christ our Bridegroom:

“O faithful, let us be on fire with love of the Bridegroom, and with lamps burning, let us go out to meet Him. May the light of our virtue shine brightly, and may our faith be radiant. With the wise virgins, let us prepare to enter the banquet hall of the Lord; for the divine Spouse offers us all the crown of immortality.”

The Bridegroom is here! Go and welcome Him!

Help us Keep our Lamps Burning

In order for our monastery to keep our spiritual lamps burning with the oil of love and desire for God, we also need to keep our physical "lamps" burning! You can help us to keep both lamps alight by your spiritual and physical support. We invite you to join us for our benefit dinner, the "Bridegroom's Banquet" or to donate towards the matching funds!

About the Event

Enjoy a buffet dinner, live music and an evening with us and our guests. Learn more about & support our life of prayer and hospitality.

The Bridegroom's Banquet

Nov. 5, 2016

St. Joseph Byzantine Catholic Church
Brecksville, Ohio

Adults 21 and older may attend

Free Admission (Registration Required)
Register by Oct. 21

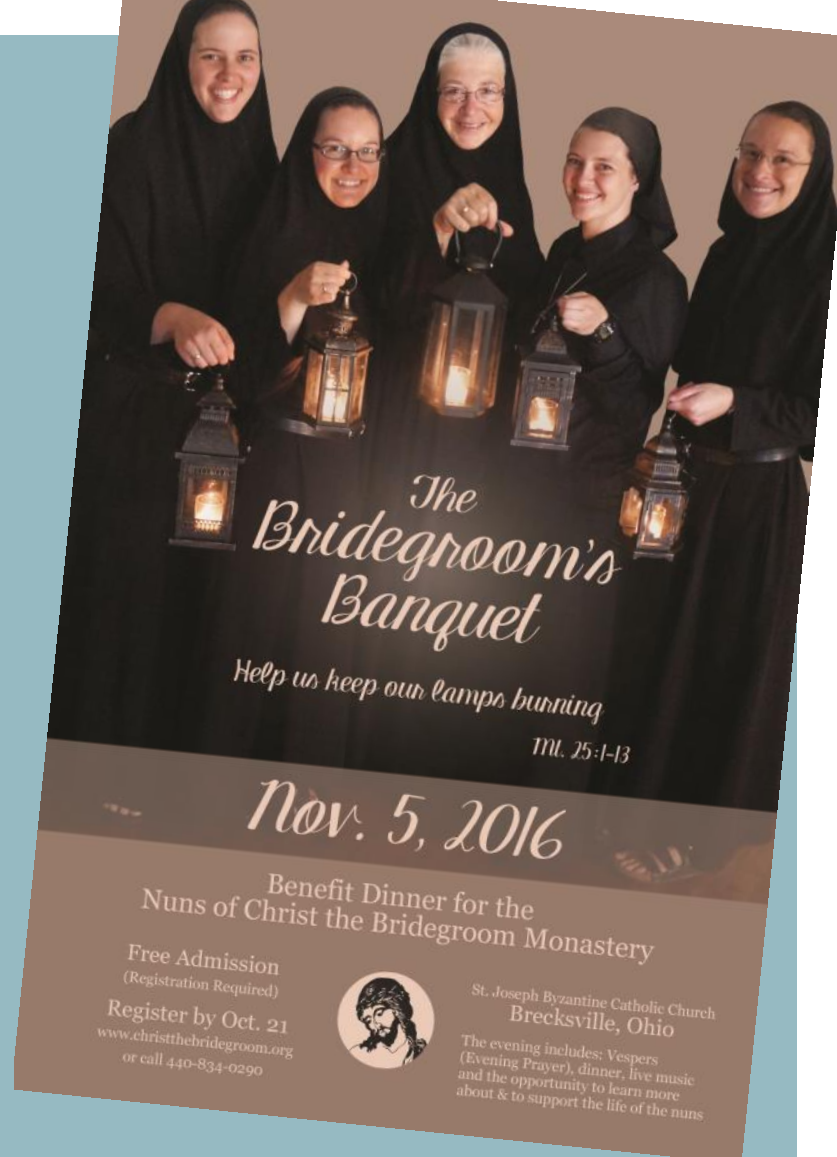
4:00 - 5:00 p.m.	Parish Vigil Divine Liturgy (Optional)
5:00 p.m.	Doors open to event
5:30 - 6:00 p.m.	Vespers (Evening Prayer)
6:20 p.m.	Dinner
7:00 p.m.	Presentation & appeal
7:30 p.m.	Dessert, live music
8:00 p.m.	Announcement of total donations raised

How to Register

1. Visit www.christthebridegroom.org
 2. Click on the "Bridegroom's Banquet" tab
- With questions, please call 440-834-0290.

Your Donations will be Doubled!

A generous benefactor has pledged to match donations given/pledged at the event, up to \$50,000! Whatever you can give will be doubled!



How to Help if You Can't Attend the Event

Your donation can still be doubled! Send in a donation before Nov. 5 and indicate "Bridegroom's Banquet." We are also in need of your prayers for a beautiful and fruitful event!

Where Will the Funds Go?

Your donation will help with two needs:

1. To keep our monastery running so that we can continue our life of prayer and hospitality
2. To purchase/construct at least one cabin ("poustinia") to meet the growing need for personal retreat space for our retreatants and our growing community





Just as He is

The rasophore (“robe bearer”) is a nun of the first degree; she is a beginner who embarks more seriously in the journey of the monastic life. The dokimos becomes a rasophore during a liturgical service in which she is tonsured and, as a sign of commitment, is given the long-sleeved dress, apostolnik, belt, riassa and skufia. A new monastic name, chosen by the Hegumena, is given at that time. The dokimos may suggest up to three names to be prayerfully considered by the Hegumena. After the completion of the three-year rasophorate, the rasophore will request to make her life profession and be tonsured as a stavrophore nun or she may request to extend her rasophorate up to a year.

Sr. Iliana has just completed her first year as a rasophore nun (“robe bearer,” similar to a novice). Our typikon (rule of life) states that in our monastery this first year is a “time of limited communication with those outside the monastery so that the rasophore may learn to depend on her Bridegroom alone.” This period of time is a similar experience to what a Roman Catholic religious community would call the “canonical year” of a novice. Here is a reflection on this year from Sr. Iliana:

During our trip to Connecticut for our friend Sr. Brigid’s profession of her perpetual vows with the Sisters of Life, I asked one of the sisters how she would describe a canonical year. With dramatic gestures, groans and smiles, she used phrases such as “a time of lockdown at the Motherhouse” and “landscaping of the heart,” knowing just how indescribable this time really was. Although difficult to describe, the first year as a rasophore is certainly a school for prayer. It is a time in the desert, learning to hear His “still, small voice” (I Kings 19:12) and to rely on Him for everything. Learning to rely on Him alone is difficult and takes a lot of trust in His love. In fact, if you fail to realize that He loves you, it can be downright terrifying.

I was recently reading about how the disciples became terrified when Jesus fell asleep in a boat during a great storm (Mark 4:35-41). St. Mark writes, “And leaving the crowd, they took Him with them, just as He was, in the boat” (Mark 4:36). It immediately struck me: do I take Jesus “just as He is”? I panic so easily, I run and wake Him, crying out, “do You care” (Mark 4:38)? Sure, I was willing to have Jesus, as long as I was surrounded by good friends and loving family, as long as

I felt like I had an important job and was recognized for my hard work, as long as Jesus gave me deep spiritual insights which I could discuss with eloquence with my spiritual father. The list of “as long as” seemed endless. But would I take Him, just as He was, alone and pinned to the Cross? Would I take Him in my poverty, my misery, my weakness and my complete dependence? Would I take Him utterly stripped and desolate, or would I run to wake Him and beg Him to console me? Would I take His LOVE just as it is – constant and unshakable – or did I only believe in His love when I was being “good?”

My first year as a rasophore has been a year of learning to trust Him just as He is in whatever He is doing—a time of loving His will and all that comes from His hand, even when He seems to be quietly sleeping. It has been a time of allowing Him to sleep in my boat and rather than waking Him, choosing to rest there beside Him. In the Song of Songs we read, “Who is this coming from the desert leaning upon her lover” (Sg 8:5)? It is in the desert that I learn to cast all my burden onto Him because He cares for me (I Pt 5:7) and to trust Him in the midst of fears and trials. Moses encouraged the Israelites when they were in great fear, “The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be still” (Ex 14:14). In the parable of the sower and the seed we hear that the seed in rocky soil has no root and withers away (Mk 4: 1-20). When we face loneliness, illness, helplessness or fear do we still trust or does our faith simply die for lack of roots? How many of us are willing to simply let Jesus sleep in our boats, to trust that He is acting in the quiet, and to trust that He will never let us drown?

RENOVATION UPDATE

Our beautiful “East Wing” is completed! This wing of the monastery was formerly a large room with an indoor pool in disrepair. Now the space is so much more useful! The two guest rooms have been in nearly constant use all summer, and Sr. Iliana has been happily painting away in the iconography studio. God-willing, the guest rooms will eventually become cells for future nuns. See our spring issue for the “before” and “during construction” photos. Thank you again to all of our benefactors!



RECENT TALKS & GROUP VISITS

- Victoria gave her vocation story at the Tolle Lege Summer Institute at Borromeo Seminary in Wickliffe, Ohio.
- Mother Theodora spoke about monastic life and our monastery at the June 14 meeting of the Youngstown-Warren Chapter of the St. John Chrysostom Society.
- Mother Gabriella spoke to the children at the St. Francis de Sales Vacation Bible School in Akron, Ohio.
- A group of teens from St. Helen parish in Newbury, Ohio, came for a day of service.
- We hosted a summer gathering for a group comprised of Byzantine Catholic, Orthodox and Roman Catholic young adults.



- A group of priests and seminarians from the Diocese of Cleveland came for a day of service.

VIDEOS TO WATCH

- We attended the ByzanTEEN Youth Rally at Notre Dame College in South Euclid, Ohio, and coordinated the ice breaker and service project. An excellent video montage of the rally can be found on YouTube. Search “ByzanTEEN Youth Rally 2016,” by dbratnickproductions.



- We were interviewed about prayer for a series of videos that have been produced by the Eparchy of Parma and will be posted periodically on the eparchy’s newly redesigned website: www.parma.org.

Girls' Camp



Our 7th annual Girls' Camp was again a beautiful, grace-filled experience for the teen-girl participants and for us. We celebrated the Year of Mercy with our theme from Psalm 118: "His Mercy Endures Forever." A record number of girls (25) joined us June 23-26, to camp out on our property, pray many of the daily liturgical services with us, listen to talks on mercy and the vocations of marriage, single life and monastic life, participate in other activities, and experience God's mercy in a profound way through the Mystery of Holy Repentance (Confession).

The camp is an event sponsored by the Eparchy of Parma Office of Vocations and run by our monastery with the help of some young adult facilitators and two hard-working volunteer cooks!

Almost all of the girls named Confession as their favorite part of the weekend. One participant commented, "I also really enjoyed the talks because it was so amazing to hear how Christ worked in the lives of others."

The camp culminated with a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy celebrated by Bishop John Kudrick at the Shrine of Our Lady of Mariapoch (across the street from the monastery), at which the Boys' Camp participants and the families of the campers from both camps joined together. The Liturgy was followed by a lunch and awards program.

Pilgrimage

*to the Shrine
of Our Lady
of Mariapoch*



The shrine celebrated its 60th anniversary this year, and a high point was the annual pilgrimage, Aug. 13-14. Families and individuals from the Eparchy of Parma and beyond gathered for prayer, talks and fellowship. We coordinated the teen campout, cantored some of the services, and invited the keynote speaker, Fr. Boniface Hicks, OSB, from St. Vincent Archabbey in Latrobe, Pa. Fr. Boniface spoke on mercy and the Mother of God, and Deacon Jeff Mierzejewski spoke on the role of the cantor. Many pilgrims experienced God's mercy through the Mysteries (Sacraments) of Holy Anointing and Holy Repentance.



Watch Fr. Boniface's talk on our Aug. 20th blog post



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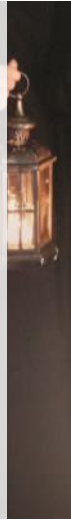


"The world needs you every bit as much as a sailor on the high seas needs a beacon to guide him to a safe haven. Be beacons to those near to you and, above all, to those far away."

Be *torches*

to guide men and women along their journey through the dark night of time."

—Pope Francis
Apostolic Constitution
Vultum Dei Quærere
on Women's Contemplative Life



Nov. 5, 2016

The Bridegroom's Banquet

More information inside!



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"With vigilance as our lamp and zeal of the Holy Spirit as our oil, we embody an attitude of expectant joy, waiting for our Bridegroom and longing for the Eternal Wedding Banquet, seeking to live as much as possible in that Banquet now. It is from the table of the Banquet that we receive the grace to impart our fervor for Christ and His Church in a radical and life-changing way to all who encounter our monastic community."

—From our monastic typikon (rule of life)

